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1963/10/26

219. Letter From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)[1]

MACJ234

Saigon, October 26, 1963.

DEAR AMBASSADOR LODGE: I am increasingly concerned over the continued, and probably accelerating, utilization by the Viet Cong of Cambodian territory. Heavier and more sophisticated Sino/Soviet Bloc weapons are turning up in the Delta and elsewhere in RVN. History points up the indispensable role of neighboring friendly territories for resupply and communications points in connection with insurgent warfare. Mines, grenades and demolition charges are being detonated in the Republic of Vietnam filled with explosive materials brought in from Cambodia. Prisoner of War interrogations relate in considerable detail the activities and movements of VC personnel

[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159, SGN 963, 19 GVN. A copy was sent to CINCPAC.

shuttling between Cambodia and RVN. The Watch Committee in Washington recently reaffirmed all this on 17 October 1963, stating in part, "that cumulative evidence . . . . [2] makes it clear that the Viet Cong are continuing to use Cambodian territory as a base of operations, sanctuary and support area."[3]

Accordingly, I feel that a new effort to control and as far as possible eliminate VC activity in Cambodia is mandatory. This would include closing off the infiltration pipeline, and shutting down the Viet Cong bases in Cambodia. Failure to take positive action in this respect could prolong the current war in the Republic of Vietnam.

Though I appreciate this is primarily a GVN–Cambodia issue, I feel there are some military measures that should be given consideration (we can assist in some) such as:

a. Permit photo reconnaissance flights on the Cambodian side of the border.

b. Relax current restrictions on clandestine intelligence operations across the border in Cambodia.

c. Institute a "hot pursuit" policy authorizing ground forces in contact with the Viet Cong to pursue enemy units across the border. This permission should extend to pursuit of Cambodian forces found violating RVN territory.

d. Impose rigid inspectional controls on Cambodian use of the Mekong River in attempting to prevent the introduction of hostile personnel and contraband into the RVN.

One of our main difficulties has been the collection of hard intelligence, and implementation of the above should go a long way toward providing more of the answers, as well as contributing toward an improved operational situation.

In summary, I cannot help but be disturbed over the present situation in Cambodia from a military point of view. The flow of weapons and ammunition coming from there, and the continued VC use of that territory for recuperation, regroupment and resupply should not be permitted.

I appreciate that this is a difficult diplomatic task to accomplish. However, I feel we should continue in our efforts in the hope we can make some gain—even though small, in effecting more rigid control of the border.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Harkins[4]
General, United States Army

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[2] Ellipsis in the source text.
[3] The Watch Committee report of October 17 has not been found.
[4] Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.